

Christine E. Sleeter

Un-Standardizing
Curriculum

**Multicultural Teaching in the
Standards-Based Classroom**

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION SERIES James A. Banks, Editor

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Standards, Multicultural Education, and Central Curriculum Questions

In 1997, when I was presenting the conceptual framework for California State University–Monterey Bay’s Master of Arts in Education program to a group of county-level administrators, I recall them blanching when I mentioned constructivist learning (at the time, I was unaware of debates about “fuzzy math”¹). When they heard about the program’s emphasis on multicultural curriculum, they told me that this is not what the schools needed; instead the schools needed pedagogy that would close the achievement gap. They were looking for knowledge and insights to help address an important equity issue—student learning in very diverse communities—yet, paradoxically, regarded equity frameworks and diverse funds of knowledge as irrelevant.

STANDARDS AND DIVERSE FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

As a society, we do not collectively seem to know how to educate a diverse population well. Nor do we collectively seem to know how to approach many other challenges that relate directly to equity and diversity, such as distributing resources in ways that work for diverse communities or communicating across lines of difference without regarding the differences themselves as a problem. Parker (2003) asked a fundamental question: “How can we live together justly, in ways that are mutually satisfying, and which leave our differences, both individual and group, intact and our multiple identities recognized” (p. 20)? The answers, I believe, lie *within* diversity rather than outside of or despite it. The main problem is learning to value points of view and accumulated knowledge that is not dominant and has been routinely excluded from the mainstream. As Apple (1999)

pointed out, "Curriculum is itself part of what has been called a selective tradition. That is, from the vast universe of possible knowledge, only some knowledge gets to be official knowledge" (p. 11). That narrowing of what it is possible to know results in paradoxical situations such as trying to address an equity issue—the achievement gap—with only a limited range of conceptual tools for understanding why it exists in the first place.

Differences systematically serve as a basis for distributing resources and opportunities inequitably, which can make the standards movement appear to be a helpful solution. For many equity-minded educators, setting clear standards for all students is a way of minimizing the degree to which race and class structure inequitable access to an academically challenging curriculum. As Thompson (2001) maintained, standards-based reform "departs radically from the tracking and sorting carried out by the factory-style school of yore." He argued that standards-based reform promotes equity by including students, parents, and teachers in a shared understanding of goals, and by making goal attainment public. Expectations are no longer a secret, and schools can no longer fail to educate with impunity. J. B. Hunt, governor of North Carolina (2003), agreed that one virtue of standards-based reform is its transparency, making publicly visible exactly what is expected of students, how they will be assessed, and how they are doing. By making curriculum standards transparent and results visible, students would no longer be subjected to disjointed or unchallenging curriculum that does not prepare them for public life and the workplace, nor be subjected to teachers who do not teach.

There are beginning to be reports that in some schools, students demonstrate more learning on tests because of standards-based reform. For example, based on a study of reading and math performance in Chicago Public Schools, Roderick, Jacob, and Bryk (2002) found improved achievement in the lowest performing schools, particularly those that serve African American students. Because standards provide a public goal that can be used as a tool to strength curriculum and instruction, equity advocates such as Haycock and Craig (2002) advise administrators to use standards to reshape curriculum and instruction in their own schools.

Paradoxically, the use of standards-based reform as a way of eliminating inequity has resulted in homogenizing the curriculum, even while classrooms in the United States have become more diverse. Many educators today assume that curricula are now sufficiently multicultural and that this is no longer an important issue. However, based on a historical analysis of textbook controversies, Zimmerman (2002) observed that we now have "a history of many colors but one idea, culturally diverse yet intellectually static" (p. 15). Glickman (2000/01) characterized standardized curriculum as the institutionalization of a "single definition" of a well-educated person,

when what we need in a democracy that faces immense challenges is a "marketplace of ideas and a diversity of perspectives" (p. 49).

Diverse funds of knowledge means that everyone does not learn the same things. Allowing for development of diversity in expertise can serve as an intellectual resource for constructive participation in a multicultural democracy and a diverse world. It is to our benefit that we do *not* all learn the same thing, beyond the basic skills. Helping next generations acquire intellectual resources of diverse communities, including those that have been historically silenced, can enable creative dialog and work, out of which we might better address problems that seem intractable. Examples of such problems are as follows:

- As U.S. citizens, we severely shortchange our ability to communicate with the rest of the world when we insist that communication be done in English because most of us are not bilingual, that schoolchildren learn English only, and that languages other than English be "overcome" rather than nurtured. If we began to expect that everyone master at least two languages (including English), our collective ability to communicate with the rest of the world would be greatly strengthened.
- Many citizens of the United States worry about youth learning values that prize excess materialism rather than spiritual development. Mainstream citizens are often unaware of strong spiritual roots within many non-European indigenous and immigrant communities, from whom all of us can learn.
- The dominant way of life in the United States is at odds with the preservation of the natural environment. It might be necessary to human existence, over the long run, to learn from, rather than discarding, bodies of human wisdom, which have arisen outside the so-called Western tradition, that can give insights about living sustainably with the earth.
- Many people feel powerless to make changes in society, yet there are long histories of struggle that show how people working collectively have made changes in the past. Familiarity with these histories can inform current efforts.
- Historically, there have been various ways of constructing egalitarian social and economic systems, and political systems that are more democratic than our own. The more we know about multiple alternatives, the better we can improve the systems we have currently.

In these examples I do not mean to suggest replacing one set of standards with another, but rather I am suggesting that we question the

Martinez

wisdom of standardizing what everyone teaches and learns. Nor am I calling for dismantling traditional knowledge. Rather, I am advocating for attending to, valuing, learning from, and passing on a much wider array of knowledge than that which resides in traditional bodies of school knowledge only. As Pinar (2004) argued, what is at stake right now, in a context that has converted intellectual inquiry as a goal of teaching to fixation on "bottom-line" test score production, "is control of the curriculum, what teachers are permitted to teach, what children are permitted to study" (p. xii). Thus the "why" of multicultural curriculum is that it reflects and teaches diverse funds of knowledge both as a social resource and as a handmaiden to intellectual inquiry.

There is no single "how" of multicultural curriculum. The framework that is developed in this book offers a way of planning that takes into consideration a variety of factors, including academic achievement. Even teachers whose work is closely defined by content standards and testing can usually find spaces for adapting, modifying, or developing intellectually rich multicultural curriculum. This book's framework for multicultural curriculum design is situated within four central curriculum questions.

CENTRAL CURRICULUM QUESTIONS

Curriculum theorists and designers have long wrestled with several central, persisting questions (e.g., Apple, 2004a; Bellack & Kliebard, 1977; Beyer & Liston, 1996; Kliebard, 1982; Taba, 1962). I have synthesized them into the following four, which form a skeletal structure for this book (as delineated at the end of this chapter):

1. What purposes should the curriculum serve?
2. How should knowledge be selected, who decides what knowledge is most worth teaching and learning, and what is the relationship between those in the classroom and the knowledge selection process?
3. What is the nature of students and the learning process, and how does it suggest organizing learning experiences and relationships?
4. How should curriculum be evaluated? How should learning be evaluated? To whom is curriculum evaluation accountable?

These questions are partly normative: answers rest on value judgments and moral stands. Whose answers prevail, ultimately, is a political matter. Kliebard (1995) emphasized that "the curriculum at any time and place becomes the site of a battleground where the fight is over whose values

and beliefs will achieve the legitimation and the respect that acceptance into the national discourse provides" (p. 250).

Kliebard (1982) identified four main groups that emerged in twentieth-century debates over these questions: the *humanists*, "guardians of an ancient tradition tied to the power of reason and what they regarded as the finest in the Western cultural heritage" (p. 23); the *developmentalists*, who believed curriculum should derive from the interests and growth of the child; the *social efficiency educators*, who believed the curriculum should be standardized around the needs of an industrial society; and the *social meliorists*, who saw the curriculum as a way of preparing citizens to address social issues. Each group holds a different conception of what curriculum is for and how it should be selected, organized, and evaluated. While humanists emphasize developing powers of reason and developmentalists focus more broadly on the development of the whole child, social efficiency educators and social meliorists take their purposes from needs of society. Social efficiency educators generally ground their view in needs of an expanding capitalist economy; social meliorists place human social problems at the center of concern. These divergent groups and struggles for legitimation continue, as will be examined later in this chapter.

It is deceptively easy, however, to shift from questions of value and ideology, to questions of method. In his classic book *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, Ralph Tyler (1969) proposed principles and process for curriculum planning that turned the central questions listed above into four sequential steps:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
 2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
 3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
 4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?
- (p. 1)

Although the first question is normative, Tyler assumed that once it is answered, we can get on with the business of following sequential planning steps.

In fact, reducing normative and philosophical questions to technical matters leads to the reduction of curriculum to what is measurable. Short (1986) explained that "measured" curricula "take as their key design feature the reduction of their intended outcomes to pre-specified elements, which, when 'taught' and 'learned,' can be measured, and on which a definitive report of 'results' can be made public" (p. 6). In his analysis of nine different "fully articulated, carefully explained and argued" curriculum

Martinez

designs from the past (p. 3), he noted that none advocate reduction of curriculum to what can be measured. Rather, "all advocate rich, expansive, evocative curricula in which educative consequences that are valued, sought, and achieved are seldom fully known [until] after the curriculum is activated and engaged by pupils" (p. 7).

The reduction of ethical questions to measurement truncates a reasoning loop that silences alternative points of view. As Apple (2004a) pointed out, "in the quest for orderliness, the political process by which often competing visions of purposes deal with each other and come to some sort of understanding is virtually ignored" (p. 105). Beyer and Liston (1996) offer a broader definition of *curriculum* than the content standards-textbook-test trilogy common to today: "Curriculum is the centerpiece of educational activity. It includes the formal, overt knowledge that is central to the activities of teaching, as well as more tacit, subliminal messages—transmitted through the process of acting and interacting within a particular kind of institution—that foster the inculcation of particular values, attitudes, and dispositions" (p. xv).

Beyer and Liston's definition incorporates the hidden curriculum, which is what students actually learn through the ongoing, repetitive processes of the classroom—its "daily grind" (Jackson, 1968). Horn (2003) defined the *hidden curriculum* as the "unrecognized and sometimes unintended knowledge, values, and beliefs that are part of the learning process in schools and classrooms." It includes not what teachers plan, but rather what students learn, often unconsciously, by how they experience the school and classroom. As Sambell and McDowell (1998) explained, "the hidden curriculum is expressed in terms of the distinction between 'what is meant to happen,' that is, the curriculum stated officially by the educational system or institution, and what teachers and learners actually do and experience 'on the ground,' a kind of *de facto* curriculum." Although there may always be unplanned space between what teachers intend and what students learn, this broader conception of curriculum offers teachers a wider array of planning considerations than only the content in textbooks, curriculum guides, standards, and tests.

The standards movement and multicultural movements address the four key curriculum questions differently, and in some respects they clash. This is because they have different social origins, and they conceptualize curriculum, diversity, and equity differently.

The Multicultural Movements and Curriculum

In the United States the civil rights movement spawned multicultural education, building on previous movements. James Banks (1996) traced

its early roots to the ethnic studies movement of the early twentieth century, and particularly to the work of African American scholars. Lei and Grant (2001) also connected multicultural education to the cultural pluralism movement of the 1940s and the progressive education movement, in which John Dewey was a major figure. Cherry Banks (2005) examined parallels between multicultural education and the intergroup education movement of the 1920s–1950s.

The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the civil rights movement opened the door for groups who had been excluded from schools, or from decision making about schools, to speak. Gay (1983) described the ensuing process of movement building:

The arenas of activity moved from courtrooms and the southern states to the northern ghettos and the campuses of colleges and schools. The ideological and strategic focus of the movement shifted from passivity and perseverance in the face of adversity to aggression, self-determination, cultural consciousness, and political power. (p. 53)

As Gay noted, when schools were initially desegregated, parents and community leaders of color began to demand that the curriculum reflect their communities, and that teachers expect the same level of academic learning of their children as they did of White children. While schools staffed by White teachers generally regarded the cultures and language backgrounds of children of color as deficient, advocates and scholars from communities of color and language-minority communities argued that culture and language are strengths on which learning can and should be built. The civil rights movement ushered in a vibrant proliferation of movements for equity. The women's movement challenged patriarchy in its myriad forms; the bilingual education movement questioned the hegemony of English, given the rich diversity of languages globally as well as within the United States. Later, the disability rights movement and the gay/lesbian movement challenged legalized and institutionalized assumptions about normalcy.

Multicultural education has served as an arena for working on school-related equity and social justice issues from vantage points of multiple historically marginalized communities. Within its larger discourse about comprehensive reform of schools, one can identify at least four related strands of work on curriculum that multicultural educators address: access to quality curriculum, textbook content, relevance of curriculum to students, and models of curriculum transformation. Embedded in all of these strands are visions of a rich curriculum that will enable young people to examine ways in which a diverse country has struggled to live up to its own ideals of justice, freedom, and equality.